

Emergency Support Function #15 – External Affairs Annex

ESF Coordinator:

Department of Homeland Security

Primary Agency:

Department of Homeland Security/Emergency
Preparedness and Response/Federal Emergency
Management Agency

Support Agencies:

All

Introduction

Purpose

Emergency Support Function (ESF) #15 – External Affairs ensures that sufficient Federal assets are deployed to the field during incidents requiring a coordinated Federal response to provide accurate, coordinated, and timely information to affected audiences, including governments, media, the private sector, and the local populace. ESF #15 provides the resource support and mechanisms to implement the National Response Plan – Incident Communications Emergency Policy and Procedures (NRP-ICEPP) described in the NRP Public Affairs Support Annex.

Scope

- ESF #15 coordinates Federal actions to provide the required external affairs support to Federal, State, local, and tribal incident management elements. This annex details the establishment of support positions to coordinate communications to various audiences. ESF #15 applies to all Federal departments and agencies that may require public affairs support or whose public affairs assets may be employed during incidents requiring a coordinated Federal response.
- The provisions of this annex apply to any incident for which the Secretary of Homeland Security decides to activate the annex, and any National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan (NCP) response or other event designated by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Assistant Secretary

for Public Affairs where significant interagency coordination is required.

- **ESF #15 integrates Public Affairs, Congressional Affairs, State, territorial, local and tribal Coordination, Community Relations, and the Private Sector under the coordinating auspices of external affairs.** The primary functions of each of these areas are described in the “Concept of Operations” section below.
- ESF #15 provides the resources and structure for the implementation of the NRP-ICEPP. Incident communications actions contained in the NRP-ICEPP are consistent with the template established in the National Incident Management System (NIMS). NCP and Alien Migrant Interdiction Operations guidelines also utilize DHS Office of Public Affairs (OPA) resources and fall under the provisions of this annex. Personnel operating under these plans must be familiar with the provisions of ESF #15 in the event that the ESF is activated.

Policies

- Federal planning for external affairs functions recognizes State, local, and tribal responsibilities for providing information to their citizens. Nothing in this document should be construed as diminishing or usurping those responsibilities. In the unlikely event that State, local, and tribal governments are unable to perform these responsibilities, the Federal Government may provide vital health and safety information to the affected population.

- State, local, and tribal external affairs elements are fully integrated into ESF #15.
- The external affairs efforts are coordinated in support of a unified message as directed by the DHS Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs.

Concept of Operations

ESF #15 identifies the procedures to resource the external affairs processes as described in the NRP. External affairs resources are coordinated by the ESF #15 representatives in the National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) as directed by the DHS Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs. ESF #15 provides the Federal resource and implementation mechanisms to ensure delivery of

the messages developed in coordination with the interagency core group (described in the Public Affairs Support Annex) and the Incident Advisory Council (IAC). The staff of the DHS OPA coordinates messages with public affairs representatives from all involved departments and agencies. See the Public Affairs Support Annex for more detail.

General

ESF #15 Coordinator: The ESF 15 External Affairs Officer, or Coordinator, is assigned by the ESF 15 Director prior to or immediately after incidents of national significance and incidents requiring a coordinated Federal response. This includes National Security Special Events (NSSE). The Coordinator serves as the primary external affairs advisor to the PFO, FCO, and JFO Coordination Group and Staff. The Coordinator has a dual-report responsibility to both the ESF 15 Director and the PFO. Specific duties include coordinating and developing the external affairs and communications strategy in support of the PFO and the incident action plan. The Coordinator is responsible for coordinating the external affairs information flow among the ESF 15 Director, PFO, FCO, JFO, other departments and agencies, state, local, tribal counterparts. The Coordinator is also responsible for coordinating visits by governmental officials, foreign dignitaries, and other VIPs.

Resource	Supports external affairs by:
Public Affairs (PA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coordinating messages with Federal, State, local, and tribal governments and establishing a Federal Joint Information Center (JIC). ▪ Gathering information on the incident. ▪ Providing incident-related information through the media and other sources to individuals, families, businesses, and industries directly or indirectly affected by the incident. ▪ Using a broad range of resources to disseminate information. ▪ Monitoring news coverage to ensure that accurate information is disseminated. ▪ Handling appropriate special projects such as news conferences and press operations for incident area tours by government officials and other dignitaries. ▪ Providing support and advice to the Principal Federal Official, the Federal Coordinating Officer/Federal Resource Coordinator, and other members of the JFO Coordination Group. ▪ Providing basic services, such as communications and supplies, to assist the news media in disseminating information to the public. ▪ Overseeing the key function of media relations.

Resource	Supports external affairs by:
Community Relations (CR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Preparing an initial action plan with incident-specific guidance and objectives, at the beginning of an actual or potential incident. ▪ Conducting the external affairs function in a joint manner between Federal, State and tribal personnel, when available. Field teams are organized and dispersed throughout the affected area. Teams include trained Federal, State, tribal, and, if necessary, locally hired persons who know the community. ▪ Coordinating closely with the affected State(s) to identify community leaders (e.g., grassroots, political, religious, educational, tribal, business, labor, ethnic) and neighborhood advocacy groups to assist in the rapid dissemination of information, identify unmet needs, establish an ongoing dialogue and information exchange, and facilitate collaborative Federal, State, local and tribal planning and mutual support for disaster recovery. ▪ Deploying management and field officers simultaneously with other initial elements as directed by the ESF #15 coordinator at the JFO.
Congressional Affairs (CA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establishing contact with congressional offices representing affected areas to provide information on the incident. ▪ Organizing an initial interagency congressional briefing within 18 hours of the event when possible and conducting daily briefings thereafter. ▪ Arranging for incident site visits for Members of Congress and their staffs. ▪ Responding to congressional inquiries. ▪ Assisting in the development of written materials for presentations and making congressional notifications. ▪ Coordinating with the local liaison officers (LNOs) on all CA issues to ensure coordinated efforts.
State, Local and Tribal Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promoting Federal interaction with State, local, and tribal governments. ▪ Implementing a system of information-sharing among Federal, State, local, and tribal governments. ▪ Informing State, local and tribal elected and appointed officials on response efforts, protocols, and recovery programs. ▪ Disseminating information with the assistance of State municipal leagues and county associations and tribal governments.

Resource	Supports external affairs by:
Tribal Affairs (TA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Providing a Tribal Relations Officer to coordinate with tribal governments on all aspects of incident management operations and report directly to the External Affairs Officer or JFO Coordination Group. ▪ Supporting the Tribal Relations Operations Element with incident-specific subject-matter experts from other departments and agencies, if and when required. ▪ When appropriate, establish a Tribal Relations Information Element within the Tribal Relations Operations Element to manage the timely flow of information to and from the tribes involved in the incident. ▪ Organizing and managing a Tribal Relations Field Component to facilitate Federal Government relations with tribal governments and their incident management organizations, communities, victims, and tribal advocacy groups.

Resource	Supports external affairs by:
Private Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sector Coordinating Councils (SCCs) working with established information sharing mechanisms identify individual(s) to serve as incident communications coordinators for their respective sector. ▪ Representatives serve as the primary reception and transmission point for incident communications products from DHS Public Affairs/Sector Specific Agencies, and retain the responsibility for dissemination to counterpart communicators within their sector. ▪ Associations that have similar roles to the CI/KR SCCs will also identify incident communications contact points for dissemination as above for their members.

Organization

The DHS Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, in coordination with the NRCC, activates and directs ESF #15 procedures. The DHS/FEMA OPA designates a DHS/FEMA Public Affairs staff member as an ESF #15 representative to staff the NRCC as directed. When activated, ESF #15 activities are implemented in coordination with the DHS OPA components of the National Operations Center (NOC) and IAC. The ESF #15 coordinator alerts

additional supporting departments and agencies to provide representatives to the appropriate ESF #15 location, or to provide representatives who are immediately available via telecommunications (e.g., telephone, fax, conference calls) to provide support.

External affairs components collocate with the Command Staff as designated in the NIMS and the NRP. ESF #15 components provide appropriate representatives available to deploy rapidly to the incident location.

Responsibilities

Primary Agency: DHS/FEMA

Resources provided by DHS/FEMA in support of ESF #15 missions include:

- **Emergency Alert System (EAS):** The Federal Communications Commission designed the EAS as a tool for authorities to quickly send important emergency information to a specific area. The EAS is designed to deliver alert and warnings taking into account the needs of such special populations as the deaf and those without English language proficiency. While the FCC is tasked with the regulatory authority, DHS/FEMA is the EAS executive agent for the White House. As such, DHS/FEMA is responsible for the overall operation of EAS.
- **Activation and Operation of National Level EAS:** When the EAS activation order is given by National authorities to DHS/FEMA, the federal government can access the facilities of broadcast stations around the Nation within several minutes. Authorities can deliver emergency alerts and warnings in an audio format.
- **State and Local Government Use:** The EAS is available for state and local use, but can be superseded by a national activation. State and local government maintain supporting plans to cover EAS operations. DHS/FEMA coordinates EAS management issues between state and local authorities.

- **Mobile Emergency Response Support (MERS):** DHS/FEMA MERS provides mobile telecommunications, operational support, life support, and power generation assets for the on-site management of all-hazard activities. MERS provides a deployable broadcast radio capability for multimedia communications, information processing, logistics, and operational support to Federal, State, and local authorities during incidents requiring a coordinated Federal response. MERS is a valuable recovery resource to update the public and affected population.
- **Recovery Radio Network:** DHS/FEMA/FCC works with local broadcasters to set up the Recovery Radio Network, which provides official information hourly, several times a day, about the incident response and recovery effort by offering a pool feed to local stations. Distribution can be provided through the EAS network. All broadcasters are required to have equipment to monitor and air EAS programs, and most primary EAS stations have portable, remote pick-up equipment that can be installed in the JIC. Alternatively, telephone or two-way radio can be used to deliver programming to the EAS distribution point. The Recovery Radio Network is implemented by a team whose size depends on the scope of the incident.

Support Agencies

Agency	Functions
Department of Commerce/National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)	NOAA Weather Radio (NWR) is a nationwide network of radio stations broadcasting continuous weather information direct from a nearby National Weather Service (NWS) office. NWR broadcasts NWS warnings, watches, forecasts, and other hazard information 24 hours a day. In conjunction with the EAS, NWR provides an "all-hazards" radio network, making it a single source for comprehensive weather and emergency information. NWR also broadcasts warning and post-event information for all types of hazards: natural (e.g., earthquakes and volcano activity), manmade (such as chemical or environmental incidents), and terrorism-related.
Department of Justice (DOJ), Community Relations Service	The Community Relations Service of DOJ, through a DHS/EPR/FEMA mission assignment, can provide conciliation and mediation training and technical assistance in matters of race, color, or national origin; conflict resolution; problem solving; cultural awareness; and community tension assessments.
Other Departments and Agencies	Depending on the nature and scope of the incident, all Federal departments and agencies support the NRP and are responsible for providing appropriate support for ESF #15 as required.

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